

Testimony of
Shannon Morrill-Cornelius, MS, CGC at WCHN
in support of
SB 857- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE FOR GENETIC COUNSELORS
February 20, 2015

My name is Shannon Morrill-Cornelius, MS, CGC and I am the manager of genetic counseling services for Western Connecticut Health Network, with our main campuses in Danbury, New Milford, and Norwalk. I reside in Southbury, CT. I am writing to testify in support of SB 857 An Act Concerning Licensure for Genetic Counselors.

By now, I am sure that you have learned much of what genetic counselors do on an everyday basis. In my role, I see mostly patients with cancer or a strong family history of cancer. My job is to work with those families to help them understand their options for genetic testing and the risks, limitations and benefits of testing for hereditary cancer conditions. After testing is completed, I perform a risk assessment based on the genetic test results and family history to provide each patient with their lifetime risk for cancer and the current surveillance guidelines for individuals at that level of risk.

If this were you or your family, wouldn't you want the person ordering these tests or calculating your lifetime risk for cancer to be experienced and board certified in their field? Wouldn't you want some assurance that the information you are getting is accurate and based on the most reliable and advanced models?

Licensure can ensure that patients and consumers are protected from unqualified providers, and unregulated practices, ensuring that the people of Connecticut get the highest level of care when they see a genetic counselor. There are documented adverse events when genetic counseling has been provided by individuals who are not trained in this field, including incomplete risk assessment, ordering the wrong test, misinterpreting test results, and unnecessary surgeries and screening tests.

As genomics becomes integrated into our primary care, the demand for genetic counseling and testing will continue to increase. Licensure will ensure that providers can be confident that they are referring patients to qualified individuals with accountability to the state and their national board (American Board of Genetic Counseling). Licensure will also remove barriers for billing for services, increasing reimbursement and creating incentive for hospitals to have more genetic counselors on staff.

Incorporating genetic counselors into the testing process has been shown to lead to cost-efficient risk identification and more appropriate genetic testing. Genetic tests cost thousands of dollars each, so having incorrect testing completed increases the cost of healthcare dramatically. Not identifying individuals at risk for cancer, not providing risk reduction options, and then having to treat them when they develop the disease, costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. Genetic counselors represent a model cost savings through appropriate triaging of preventative care for those at greatest risk.

Thank you for your time and interest.

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